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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8783  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1138

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NICOSIA 000322

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE, IO/UNP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UNFICYP](#) [CY](#)

SUBJECT: MISSING PERSONS EFFORT STILL A BRIGHT SPOT, BUT  
CHALLENGES LOOM

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Returning the skeletal remains of 2-3 victims per week to grateful family members, the UN Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) remains a bright example of sustained bi-communal cooperation in Cyprus. The pace of returns likely will spike during the summer, once the Nicosia genetics lab concludes DNA analysis of a large tranche (more than 700 pieces) of bone samples. RoC presidential elections in February and the installation of a new administration did not slow the Committee's work; if anything, cooperation with the government has improved. Active digs include Yerassa, where many Turkish Cypriot victims of the infamous 1974 Tochni massacre likely are buried, as well as smaller operations scattered across the north. Both represent major CMP challenges: Tochni because of its political significance and the aggressive cant of victims' families, and the small-scale endeavors owing to their high cost and so-far limited results. To ensure political support on both sides of the Green Line, the CMP keeps its fingers on the scales, seeking a rough balance in both dig sites and remains returns. Potential friction looms, unfortunately. CMP staff perceive a slowdown in investigations and excavations on the T/C side, likely with political underpinnings, while the Turkish Army continues to restrict operations on military installations where most remaining Greek Cypriot victims lay. Longer-term, the CMP would support a Truth Commission, were the two sides to exhibit the requisite political will to establish it. END SUMMARY.

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CMP Grateful for USG Backing  
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¶2. (SBU) In a May 16 meeting with PolChief, Christophe Girod, the CMP's international member, provided a readout of current Committee operations and future challenges on the island. He began with thanks for U.S. support of the missing persons effort on Cyprus. The Family Reception Center, constructed with USAID funds, not only had hosted families collecting their loved ones' remains, but also provided valuable spillover space for CMP technicians evaluating bone fragments and assembling skeletons. Returns were averaging 2-3 per week, Girod noted, and were becoming routine events with little fanfare or local press. International media continued to show interest in CMP activities, however, which was useful in promoting the CMP's work in potential donor countries.

¶3. (SBU) CMP technicians recently had delivered over 700 bone samples to the Nicosia laboratory conducting DNA testing; they represented the remains of nearly 200 individuals from various excavation sites. All but 20 were Greek Cypriots. Among the Turkish Cypriot victims, Girod revealed, was the father of T/C negotiator and former Nicosia Mayor Kutlay Erk. CMP officials planned to brief Erk privately in coming days, but could not rule out the story

breaking soon. (Update: On May 22, Erk told the Ambassador that the CMP indeed had informed his family. His father's funeral is being planned, and RoC President Demetris Christofias, in what would be a major gesture of reconciliation, may attend.)

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New Administration, Greater Support  
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¶4. (SBU) Political-level support from both communities remained firm, Girod asserted. No problems had surfaced during the February transition from former RoC President Tassos Papadopoulos to current G/C leader Demetris Christofias; if anything, the CMP stood to gain from the change. Papadopoulos and Greek Cypriot member Elias Georgiades had "enjoyed" icy relations, owing to political friction going back years. The Greek Cypriot member considers current Presidential Commissioner and influential Christofias adviser George Iacovou his mentor, and likely will enjoy greater access to the President and other GoC officials. Turkish Cypriot member Gulden Plumer, too, was actively and effectively representing the CMP before her "government," Girod assessed. Regrettably, she was less influential with the oft-stubborn Turkish military.

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Committee Now Treading on Sensitive Ground  
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¶5. (SBU) Yerassa, a village north of Limassol, plays host to the CMP's largest active dig, Girod revealed. Experts were excavating in a canyon site where they expected to recover

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the remains of 43 Turkish Cypriot victims killed in nearby Tochni village in 1974. Unlike most earlier returns, this one might attract significant media attention, not all positive. Depending on whose statistics one believes, between 70 and 90 T/Cs were killed in Tochni in what Turkish Cypriots consider one of the worst atrocities committed by Greek Cypriots in the 1963-74 period. Tochni relatives had pressed CMP for results more aggressively than others had. Girod believed they might not silently accept the remains of their relatives, but instead publicly blame the "murderous Greeks." Such posturing did not make the officially neutral CMP's work easier, Girod lamented. Potentially raising the families' temperatures even further, most bone fragments recovered had been commingled, making assembly of full skeletons nearly impossible. "They're not going to be happy upon receiving just a femur or a skull," he explained.

¶6. (SBU) Teams were also conducting exhumations in smaller sites in northern Cyprus -- part of the CMP's efforts to balance its activities between north and south. Girod worried about the pace of recoveries and their high per-victim cost, however. Since January 1, the CMP had spent over 100,000 dollars on these digs yet exhumed only 13 victims, mostly G/Cs. Such limited results were unlikely to spawn further donations from international donors, he thought. Even worse, they might eventually cause Greek Cypriot leaders to reconsider their support for the Committee, owing to the slow pace of returns to G/C families.

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All Sailing Not Smooth  
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¶7. (SBU) CMP activities were not immune to Cyprus Problem politics, Girod observed. He attributed the poor results at the northern digs in part to the preparatory CyProb talks currently ongoing. Explaining, Girod claimed that an active process reduced pressures on Turkey/Turkish Cypriots to engage the CMP fully. More obvious, egregious signs of political meddling also had surfaced, he added. In areas close to the Buffer Zone, the Turkish Army had "cleared"

territory that likely would be transferred to G/C control in the event of a settlement. And an expected large find in Assa had failed to materialize because unknown actors had tampered, perhaps recently, with the gravesites. T/C member Plumer was working diligently to obtain "actionable intel" on additional locations, but faced great challenges from the military (whom she engaged only indirectly), from hard-line nationalists, and from villagers reluctant and/or afraid to cooperate. Nearly 1200 Greek Cypriots remained missing; without greater cooperation in the north, Girod feared the tally might not budge downward.

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Transitioning to a Truth Commission?  
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18. (SBU) Girod last touched on the idea of a Truth Commission, which would aim to determine the facts surrounding the killings and provide closure for victims' families, in exchange for criminal and civil immunity for the perpetrators. He praised human rights attorneys/activists Achilleas Demetriades and Emine Erk, who were screaming loudly in their respective communities to spur debate over the Commission's desirability, purpose, and effectiveness. Demetriades earlier had told the Embassy that the CMP, in order to assume broader responsibilities, would require a change in its formal UN mandate. Girod disagreed. "We're already exceeding our mandate with current CMP activities," he observed, adding that "all we would need to go forward is political will from both sides."

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Comment  
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19. (SBU) Despite Girod's (real) concerns over CMP challenges, the Committee remains one of the most effective bi-communal institutions in Cyprus, and we predict continued successes in the short- and medium-term. In the last twelve months, the CMP arguably made more progress -- exhuming graves, identifying samples, and conducting its first-ever returns -- than it did in its prior 26 years. Expected PR headaches from unhappy family members blaming the other side for their losses have not materialized, and the Committee mostly earns praise on both sides of the Green Line. We're therefore confident they'll weather any criticism from the Tochni families and, with sustained, engagement from Plumer

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and her team, they might even convince the Turkish Army to allow operations in less sensitive military zones. As to the Truth Commission, we support the concept and would consider supporting it through active USAID programs. It must be a Cypriot-driven initiative, as Girod, Demetriades, and Erk rightly state. Unfortunately, with the negotiations-related blame-game back in full swing, neither side is exhibiting the contrition seemingly necessary to establish such a body.  
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